

VZCZCXRO8493
OO RUEHAG RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHKB #1178 3521232
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 171232Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0518
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES IMMEDIATE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA IMMEDIATE 3183
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE IMMEDIATE 1221
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 001178

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/04/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJANI OFFICIAL EVASIVE ABOUT WHETHER VOA AND
RADIO LIBERTY WILL BE SHUT DOWN

REF: A. BAKU 1062
[1](#)B. BAKU 1153

Classified By: Charge Donald Lu, for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On December 15 PAO met with National Television and Radio Council Chairman Nushiravan Maharramov to hand over a letter from the Broadcasting Bureau of Governors and restate the USG expectation that the NTRC will not during its December 25 meeting follow through on threats to remove Radio Liberty, Voice of America and the BBC from the FM airwaves by January 1, 2009. Maharramov stopped short of promising an NTRC extension of the foreign broadcast licenses, but he indirectly suggested that the GOAJ would permit the broadcasts to continue into the new year to allow negotiations on an inter-government agreement. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Following up on the December 3 Baku visit by Doug Boynton and Enver Safir of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) and Julia Ragona of Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), PAO Terry Davidson December 15 delivered a December 10 letter from Boynton to NTRC Chairman Maharramov that outlined succinctly the USG understanding of the December 3 meetings: that the NTRC will at its December 25 meeting extend radio/TV licenses for RFE/RL and VOA, and that shortly thereafter the BBG will follow up by scheduling discussions with the negotiating team designated by Chief of Presidential Administration Ramiz Mehdiyev (Ali Hasanov and Shahn Aliyev), with the aim of finding a legal framework within which the foreign broadcasts can remain on the public airwaves in their current format.

NTRC CHAIRMAN REFUSES TO PREJUDGE COUNCIL DECISION

[1](#)3. (C) PAO repeated the USG commitment to work with the GOAJ within the framework of the law, and asked for some clarity on what we can expect at the December 25 NTRC meeting. Maharramov refused to prejudge the NTRC decision, telling the PAO that the Council is not a one-man show and that he cannot speak for the full, democratic, board. He reiterated his past comments that his announced intention to remove the broadcasts from national frequencies is simply conforming with the 2002 broadcast media law, and should not be seen as a political decision.

[1](#)4. (C) While refusing to shed direct light on the Council's decision, Maharramov did indicate that he and others within the GOAJ are quite aware of the strong U.S. and international reaction to the prospect of removing Radio Liberty, VOA and BBC from the FM airwaves, adding that Azerbaijan values its partnership with the United States and doesn't want to harm that. He also repeatedly urged the PAO to urge his

Washington colleagues to move quickly after the December 25 NTRC decision to start discussions on an agreement.

¶5. (C) PAO reminded Maharramov that the USG hopes there will be no negative Christmas surprise, and such a surprise would have serious consequences. Without being specific, Maharramov said he doesn't expect a holiday blow-up. Embassy is seeking another meeting for Charge and PAO with the Presidential Administration to demonstrate continued vigilance and urge positive action.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) As Maharramov has been the GOAJ's front man on this issue and made a number of strong statements about the importance of Azerbaijan enforcing its own laws, irrespective of foreign pressure, he is clearly in need of a face-saving exit strategy. While the possibility of an NTRC decision to remove the broadcasts from the national frequencies is still possible, especially given the NTRC's track record of broken promises, we expect the council will either extend the licenses or simply postpone a decision, allowing time for negotiations between the BBG and the Presidential Administration on a possible intergovernmental agreement.
LU